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ABSTRACT

This manual presents guidelines for providing reference service of the highest possible quality consistent with available resources. The manual is designed for orienting new staff users and serves as a source of information for librarians about departmental policy. The major goals of the reference department of the University of Nebraska (Kearney) are to facilitate access to library collections and their informational content and to support the instructional programs of the university through library and bibliographic instruction. Manual sections include: (1) an introduction; (2) library users; (3) priorities for service; (4) desk service; (5) reference desk staffing policy; (6) interlibrary loan service; (7) bibliographic services; (8) reference correspondence; and (9) orientation and instruction. (SLD)

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REFERENCE SERVICE MANUAL

CALVIN T. RYAN LIBRARY

UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA AT KEARNEY

KEARNEY, NE

REVISED OCTOBER 1993

as revised by

Roy Barnard

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REFERENCE SERVICE MANUAL

SECTION I: INTRODUCTION

A. Purpose of the Reference Service Manual

1. **General Statement** - The purpose of the Reference Service Manual is to state guidelines for providing reference service in order to insure a uniform standard of service of the highest possible quality consistent with available resources.

2. **Uses** - The manual will be used for orienting new staff members, and serve as a source of information in case librarians have questions concerning departmental policy.

3. **Annual Review of Contents** - The contents of the manual will be reviewed annually to insure that policy and practice are in conformity and that changes are made as needed.

B. Goals of Reference Service

1. **General Statement** - The two major goals of the Reference Department are: to facilitate access to library collections and to the informational content of those collections through direct personal service to the library's users, and to support the university's instructional program through providing formal and informal library and bibliographic instruction.

In accomplishing these goals the needs of library users must always be taken seriously and treated with the utmost respect. Under no circumstances should there by any discussion of an individual or a group of users, or of any transactions between user and reference librarian, outside of a professional context.

SECTION II: LIBRARY USERS

A. Service to Non-University Users

1. **General Statement** - No discrimination is made between university and non-university users when giving routine reference service. In the case of a time-consuming inquiry or in the case of special services the question of the user's affiliation may arise and some distinctions may have to be made. Guidelines for making these are given below. In applying the guidelines the librarian at the reference desk must use his or her own judgment.

2. **Guidelines for Providing Special Services**

   a. **Time-consuming Inquiries** - As a general rule, if a library user not affiliated with the University of Nebraska at Kearney (UNK) has access to a library intended to serve his/her needs which is adequate, he/she should be referred to that library for assistance. In cases where the UNK library has special resources in staff or materials and the needs of the user seem to warrant it, assistance beyond the routine may be given.

   b. **Computer Literature Searches** - See DIALOG Policy Manual and information on CD-ROM databases.

   c. **Interlibrary Loan** - Interlibrary Loan privileges are ordinarily granted only to users who are affiliated with the university. Any questions concerning eligibility for Interlibrary Loan should be referred to the Interlibrary Loan Office. A policy brochure is available as well as directions included on the back of the ILL request form. Telephone inquiries can be directed to 234-8594.

SECTION III: PRIORITIES

A. General Statement - The Reference Department gives priority to all activities involving direct service to library users. Supporting activities, although essential to maintain the quality of these services, must take a second place.

B. Service to Individual Users

1. As a general rule, service to library users who come to the Reference area takes priority over any other activity.

2. **"On Call" Period** - Librarians, even though they are not scheduled at the desk, are responsible for assisting at the reference desk during times of peak usage.

3. **Telephone Calls** - The user who comes to the Reference desk takes priority over the person who calls on the telephone or who has left an inquiry at the desk.

4. **Priorities Among Waiting Users** - In cases where there are two or more library users waiting, help should be offered first to the person who has been waiting the longest. If it appears that the answer to the inquiry will take a little time, the librarian may deal first with the questions which can be answered immediately, if this is agreeable to the persons waiting.

5. **Pending Reference Inquiries** - If the immediate needs of library users who are in the library or who are telephoning are being adequately taken care of, the next priority should be accorded to following up inquiries not answered fully when they were taken while on desk duty. All such questions must be dealt with immediately by the person who accepted them unless other arrangements have been made, or service to users who are waiting interferes.

SECTION IV: DESK SERVICE

A. General Statement and Instructions

1. Nature and Extent of Responsibilities of Librarians on Desk Duty.

a. Priorities - The primary responsibility of librarians on desk duty is provision of direct personal service to library users who come to the Reference Desk for assistance, or who call by telephone. See Section III concerning priorities.

b. Messages - Reference staff are responsible for reading the messages left with the statistics notebook as soon as they come on duty. Messages should be added as appropriate. Examples of such messages are: 1) notes concerning class assignments involving use of reference materials; 2) notes concerning materials set aside for use by library users returning later in the day; 3) notes concerning procedures for answering a difficult question being asked repetitively at the desk.

c. Approachability - Reference staff on desk duty must constantly be aware of how approachable they appear to the library users who are in need of assistance. Being approachable is a first step in encouraging users to seek assistance at the desk. Users need to be educated to the fact that individual assistance is the primary responsibility of staff on desk duty, that librarians are interested in the problems that face library users, and are willing to help. Since the attitude and behavior of staff on duty go a long way towards creating an image of the library, library staff on Reference Desk duty should strive to make that image a positive one.

d. Activity During Slack Periods - During slack periods at the desk, staff may work on other assignments, examine new reference materials, read professional literature, etc., as long as it does not interfere with the provision of desk service. Staff must be careful not to become so engrossed in other work that they fail to see users in need of

assistance in the reference area or at the public access terminals.

2. **Handling General Inquiries**

a. General Statement - It is expected that judgment will be used in determining which questions can be handled to completion by the librarian and which ones are best answered by providing guidance in selecting sources to consult. In the first category are directions, general questions concerning library policies and services, information on library holdings, and ready reference questions involving specific facts easily determined from standard sources.

b. Library Holdings - In giving information on library holdings the librarian at the Reference Desk should never give a negative answer without fully verifying the item requested and checking in all appropriate collections or sources. If the reader does not want to wait until this can be done or is satisfied with a less than complete search, indicate that it is possible that a more thorough search would locate the material wanted.

When it has been established that material needed by the reader is not available in the university library, suggestions should be made concerning other possible locations which may be appropriate such as other libraries within the UN system accessible on IRIS, GENISYS and LEON; at the public library; through Interlibrary Loan; and at local bookstores.

c. Information Service - Answers to other questions should be based on data in standard reference sources whenever possible. The printed information should be shown to the reader or, in the case of a telephone inquiry, the source of the information should be cited. It is not library policy to vouch for the accuracy of a particular answer or source, although we should be prepared to give some indication of reliability. We will not normally cross verify answers except in the case of obvious discrepancies.

d. Research and/or Instruction - In a second category are questions which require much longer, more detailed answers; e.g. questions concerning search strategy for

information in a specific field, perhaps involving several forms of materials (periodical articles, books, government documents, etc.); or questions which will require a search through a number of specialized sources which are located some distance away from the desk area.

When these more complicated, time-consuming questions arise at the desk, inform the library user courteously that his/her question will probably take considerable time to answer fully, and ask if he/she is willing to come back later for an answer or for individual help in locating the answer. The reference librarian is expected to use his or her own judgment in determining the most appropriate response and also to be considerate of the library user and any colleague who is asked for assistance.

(1) **Amount of Service** - The amount of service that can be given at any particular time will vary, depending on such factors as how busy it is at the desk, if other librarians are available to help, etc. What is practical at one time may not be at another; it is important, however, that an effort be made to provide adequate service. Some guidelines that may be followed are given below:

(a) Always try to suggest some sources and specific headings (on ROSI, the CD-ROM network, appropriate paper indexes and/or bibliographies) and encourage the library user to come back for further suggestions if the results are not satisfactory.

(b) If you are unfamiliar with what sources might be available send an E-mail query to Roy, John, or Greg.

(c) When likely sources of information are known but a search of them will be very time-consuming, or require specialized knowledge which you do not have, you should inform the user that you will contact other librarians and faculty members who are experienced in a particular area and they should check with you after you have had an opportunity to make these contacts.

(d) When the search appears to require a quick check of a large number of potential sources which would be difficult to explain to a reader, the librarian on reference duty may, if the purpose of the question seems to justify it, invest a reasonable amount of time on the research.

(2) **Instruction** - Formal instruction in the use of library records, bibliographic tools and other sources in the reference collection should be a routine part of reference service. Encourage the reader to follow your steps as you seek out the information or sources, but never force instruction on a reader who asks a simple question which can be answered by reference to one or two sources.

The use of Pathfinders should be encouraged. There are presently 49 Pathfinders which have been written. Not only are they recommended for the assistance they provide, but also as a means of developing self-reliance. Librarians on the Reference Desk should be alert to the kinds of questions that indicate a need for instruction; in general they will fall into three main categories - occasions when a student is looking for material for a paper, a speech, or other project; when a reader is investigating a topic exhaustively; and when a reader seems unfamiliar with the use of a particular reference tool and indicates an interest in learning how to use it effectively.

3. **Handling Problem Inquiries**

a. **Questions Received as Reference Desk Closes** - Whenever possible, handle questions received at closing time to completion, even if it means working past the time when scheduled to leave. However, if the question seems involved, or you have other commitments which prevent you from working past the scheduled time to leave, ask the library user to return for assistance.

b. **Recommending Reference Books for Purchase** - If a library user asks that the librarian on reference duty recommend an encyclopedia, dictionary or other reference work for purchase, an opinion may be given on the reputation of a specific work, but the opinion should always be supported by a review or comment in standard reference sources, such as the "Reference and Subscription Book Reviews" in Booklist, or Choice, etc.

4. **Recording Statistics and Questions**

a. It is the responsibility of persons assigned desk work to record questions they are unable to answer while on desk duty. The purpose of recording these questions is threefold: 1) to have a record of unanswered questions to be worked on later when there is more time to search and/or to ask for assistance from others; 2) to record questions that could not be answered with the resources in the library (specific titles and/or types of materials which should be added to the collection to answer similar questions in the future should be noted on the form); 3) to record especially difficult and complex questions to add to the department's "Difficult Queries" file, to help others save time in answering similar questions at a future date.

b. Survey and statistical information should be recorded as required.

5. **Reporting Problems**

a. **Missing reference books should be recorded.**

b. **Disorder in Book Arrangement** - Since disorders in book arrangement can cause serious inconvenience to users, the reference staff should pay continuous attention to maintaining the collection in good working order. When there is a temporary pile-up of heavily used reference books and the regular shelvers are not scheduled to work, the librarians on duty should attempt to keep the collection in good working order, reshelving books as necessary.

6. **Telephone Inquiries**

a. **Incoming Calls**

(1) Librarians, Office Service Staff and Student Assistants must not assume responsibility for answering questions concerning areas in which they lack knowledge or may have only partial or incorrect information. It is important to remember that if the response to an inquiry is to be in the negative (i.e., the library does not own the requested material), the librarian should verify the item before giving the final answer to the reader.

b. **Outgoing Calls**

(1) **General Guidelines** - When placing official calls, always identify yourself as a member of the Reference Department of the university library.

(2) **Long Distance Calls** - There are no restrictions on calls to campus or local numbers, other than need and brevity. Long distance calls must be made with discretion.

(3) **Calling Local Libraries** - Typical out-going calls are those made to libraries in the local area to obtain information about their holdings or the use of their facilities. We do not ordinarily call long distance for such information.

(4) **Public Use of Telephone** - Library telephones are available for official library business only. However, there is a free campus phone in the library entry and also a pay phone for public use.

7. **Circulation of Reference Materials**

a. **Pamphlet File** - Materials circulate for regular checkout period.

b. **Kearney and Nebraska Clipping File** - Materials do not circulate.

c. **College Catalogs**

(1) **Paper Copies of Nebraska College Catalogs** - Available on Reserve at the Circulation Desk for 2 hour checkout in the library.

(2) **College Catalogs on Microfiche** - Microfiche do not circulate.

d. **Reference Books**

(1) **Circulation for Use Outside the Library** - In general, reference materials are not circulated outside the library building. This is so they will be accessible to as many users as possible for the whole period the library is open. Many reference tools, such as periodical indexes and the latest editions of standard encyclopedias and almanacs, are in such constant demand that they cannot be taken from the building without causing severe inconvenience to other library users. In most cases, the reference needs of the majority must take priority over the needs of a single individual.

However, since some reference materials are in much less demand than others, reasonable requests to borrow less heavily used titles for brief periods of time are sometimes granted to any university borrower. (A request will be considered "reasonable" if the needs of the requestor are best served by using the volume outside the building, and it is the judgment of the librarian on duty that the removal of that volume from the Reference Collection for a brief period of time will not seriously inconvenience other library users). A reference volume will not be loaned if there is a duplicate copy available for circulation elsewhere in the library system, if a few pages that can be photocopied are all that is needed, or if an older edition will be suitable.

Circulation Desk personnel will require that a librarian fill out a "Special Permission" form before they will check out a reference book. These forms are located in the drawers on the east end of the Reference Desk.

(2) Examples of situations in which a reference volume might be loaned for use outside the library are given below. In general, the length of the loan period is based upon the needs of the requestor, and the judgment of the reference librarian as to the possible use of the materials by others.

- An hour or two, if a student would like to borrow a specific atlas for use in a classroom demonstration.

- Overnight, due back an hour after the library opens the following day when a library user needs to use a reference book after the library closes.

- Several hours, if a library user needs to take a volume elsewhere on campus for photoduplication, or to an office where an adding machine or other equipment is available to facilitate use of data contained in the reference work.

- Several days (during Spring Break for example) when no demand for a particular volume is expected.

8. **Lost and Found** - Lost items should be delivered to the Circulation Desk as soon as they are discovered. Inquiries about lost items should be referred to that desk.

9. **Interlibrary Loan** - See Section V.

10. **Referrals**

a. **General Statement** - A reasonable effort must be made to answer every reference question. When the librarian receiving the question has been unable to answer a question satisfactorily after having consulted the known sources or has reason to believe that the question cannot be answered by sources in the library, he or she should refer the reader to another source of information. (See also Section IV, A2).

b. **Referring Questions to Colleagues** - The librarian on duty should ask colleagues for advice and/or assistance as necessary, but should not refer readers to the latter without first notifying them of the problem, and telling them what sources have already been checked. Verbal communication is best, but if this is impossible, leave them a short note so they will be aware of the problem when the library user returns. Reference librarians should keep in mind the specialized knowledge held by colleagues in other departments of the library (such as Cataloging, Documents, etc.) and should call on them for help in appropriate circumstances.

c. **Referrals to Other Libraries or Services** - In general, do not refer a user to a colleague in another department, another library, or to a service without calling ahead to make sure they can be of assistance. This is a courtesy to both the library user and the person or institution to which they are being referred.

d. **Unanswered Questions** - Incompletely, unanswered questions, or those for which information does not appear to be available, should be referred to Greg, Roy or John. The Reference Department is responsible for seeing that the question is handled promptly to completion.

11. **Assisting Users at ROSI and CD-ROM Database**

a. **Responsibility** - One of the chief responsibilities of Reference Librarians is instruction in the use of ROSI and the CD-ROM databases. Since an understanding of both is a key to self-sufficiency in library use, the librarian on the desk should, if possible, accompany the library user when he or she has a question concerning either.

b. **Kinds of Problems** - When a person can't find a specific material in ROSI or the CD-ROM databases, it may be that:

(1) His/her information is incomplete.

(2) He/she doesn't understand how to use the two sytems.

(3) The library does not own the item.

(4) The item wanted is owned by the library but not represented on ROSI or the CD-ROM Database. Always verify the item before informing a reader that the library does not own it.

The reader may need help in establishing the words and/or necessary phrases for a successful search.

c. **Offering Assistance** - If someone appears to be having difficulty, ask him/her if he/she needs help. Each librarian should use his own judgment in identifying such a situation.

SECTION V: REFERENCE DESK STAFFING POLICY

The purpose of this policy is to clarify and codify the procedure for staffing the CTR Reference Desk, the main service point for patron information in the library. Staffing varies depending on librarians available and usage of the library. The following are current (93-94) procedures.

A. All librarians are eligible for Reference Desk duty during Spring and Fall semesters. Reference Desk scheduling is accomplished in three time periods during the Spring and Fall semesters: duty during the workday while UNK is in session, duty on weekends while UNK is in session, and duty on weekday nights while UNK is in session. Summer session staffing varies according to student library use.

1. **Duty During the Workday While UNK is in Session** - The Reference Desk will be staffed from 08:30 AM to 04:30 PM during the Fall and Spring semester normal work day. Reference librarians (Coordinator for Computer Searching, Coordinator for Bibliographic Instruction, Coordinator for Special Collections and Archives) will staff the desk a majority of the workday. The remaining portion of the day will be staffed by other librarians.

2. **Duty on the Weekend While UNK is in Session** - The Reference Desk will be staffed from 12:30 PM to 04:30 PM on Saturdays and from 05:30 PM to 09:30 PM on Sunday evenings during Fall and Spring semester while UNK is in session. This duty will be shared by all librarians and duty assigned either by choice or assignment.

3. Duty on Weekday Nights While UNK is in Session - The Reference Desk will be staffed from 05:30 PM to 09:30 PM Monday through Thursday evenings during Fall and Spring semesters while UNK is in session. This duty will be shared by all librarians and duty assigned either by choice or assignment. It is customary to assign librarians to work on the same night during the week.

B. Librarians are responsible for the following, listed in priority order, while staffing the desk:

1. To the best of one's ability, fully and completely either answer questions presented in person or direct the individual to sources where answers may be found. In doing this the guidelines below are to be adhered to:

a. The needs of library users must always be taken seriously and treated with utmost respect.

b. The librarian on duty should remain in the proximity of the Reference Desk unless helping a patron, taking a break, or making a routine check of the building.

c. Questions necessitating an online search should be referred to the Coordinator of Computer Searching.

d. Questions regarding the operation and/or malfunctioning of the CD-ROM Database should be referred to the Coordinator of Computer Searching.

e. Questions regarding Bibliographic Instruction should be referred to the Coordinator of Bibliographic Instruction.

f. Questions regarding the Special Collections/Archives should be referred to the Coordinator of Special Collections/Archives. Librarians may retrieve material in the Special Collections/Archives for use within the library and may allow people access to that facility if their use is noted in the entry record located in the Special Collections/Archives.

2. Answer inquiries coming in by phone on 234-8586. In answering phone inquiries librarians will adhere to the following guidelines:

a. Responses to incoming telephonie queries will be limited to providing information that is readily available.

b. Queries which will involve extensive searching will be asked to present their questions in person.

c. The library user that comes to the Reference Desk will have priority over the person who calls on the telephone or who has left an inquiry.

SECTION VI: INTERLIBRARY LOAN SERVICE

A. In general, our Interlibrary Loan policies are governed by the American Library Association's Interlibrary Loan Code for Nebraska, 1990, and by the regulations of lending libraries.

B. More specifically, our Interlibrary Loan policies are governed by the Calvin T. Ryan Library Interlibrary Loan Service Policy dated September 10, 1993.

SECTION VII: BIBLIOGRAPHIC SERVICES

A. **Reference Initiated** - When time and resources permit, librarians may prepare specialized bibliographies when the results of such bibliographic endeavors would contribute significantly to the work of the library.

B. **Computer Literature Searches** - See DIALOG Policy Manual.

SECTION VIII: REFERENCE CORRESPONDENCE

A. Incoming Inquiries

1. **Who Drafts Replies** - Incoming inquiries to the Reference Department are referred to one of the reference librarians.

2. **Signature** - A letter replying to a reference question is signed by the individual librarian answering the inquiry. Official letters, i.e., correspondence having to do with the policies and procedures of the department, are always signed by a librarian.

3. **Policy for Handling Requests** - Not all inquiries asking for general information ought to be answered by the Reference Department. In general, our policy is not to provide information for the general public that can be obtained from local libraries unless the questions can be answered quickly and briefly, nor will we complete homework assignments for students. However, replies to inquiries we do not answer should suggest a more appropriate local source of information.

The Reference Department will attempt to answer letters as fully as possible when they come from inquirers who are considered authorized library users; i.e., members of the university community, particularly the staff, alumni, trustees, state and government officials, librarians and faculty from Nebraska colleges and universities and people from the local area.

4. **Promptness in Answering** - Replies should be mailed back to inquirers no later than one week after receipt. When suitable, we would invite the inquirer to come here to use the library in person, in the event that we have neither staff nor time to answer his inquiry fully.

5. **Surveys** - Letters requesting information about the library will be referred to the appropriate librarian for reply.

6. **Supplying Photocopies** - The library will not normally supply more than 10 free pages of photocopied material as part of a reply to a reference inquiry by letter. If more copying is necessary, bibliographic information concerning the source should be supplied to the inquirer, with the suggestion that he request the material through interlibrary loan, or come to the library to use the

material here.

SECTION IX: ORIENTATION AND INSTRUCTION

A. Within the constraints of availability of staff, library instruction receives high priority in the activities of the department, second only to service to the individual user.

B. Ordinarily, the department liaison librarians conduct orientations and instruction for their departments. When they are unavailable another librarian will be scheduled.